Computer+Software News

Atari Computer Camp spells fun for kids

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GLENCOE, Md.—Kids fuss about the same things at this Atari Computer Camp that they would at any other summer sleepaway camp.

For one 13-year-old, eating is a source of grief.

"Out of the 27 meals we've had here, only two have been edible," he complained.

For most others, computers are where its at.

"My brother is in the Marine Corps, but I'll probably become a computer specialist, starting this summer."

"I don't need your advice, my friend, because "I'm the best programmer around here."

"I can't stand it when it [a computer] gets nit-picky like this."

These are the voices of children at the 200-acre Atari Computer Camp here, where campers pick up the Basics or learn to Pilot, with up to 4½ hours a day of computer free time and learning time per child.

The campers, age 10-16, are generally determined to learn to utilize Atari 800 and 1200XL computers to their own purpose, whether it is the hot pursuit of high game scores, or a search for the unerring homework partner.

What's best about this Atari Computer Camp?
● "computer learning time and computer free time."
● "the thrill of writing a program."
● "programming a picture, because I'm into the Twilight Zone books."

Nine-year old Conchita, who hails from Isla Verde, Puerto Rico, contemplates the next step in her program to create an upside down

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● "it lets me see this part of the country."
● "the quiet, out-of-the-way setting."
● "the nice, cool rooms."

From July 2-16, 46 boys and 13 girls lived at camp. After that, 81 boys and 21 girls occupied the dorms here at Oldfields School, a small, private institution for girls, grades 8-12, established in 1869.

Atari camps were founded to provide a full-fledged computer curriculum along with all the traditional summer camp activities. All seven Atari campsites are a joint venture between Atari and Specialty Camps, New York.

Upon receipt of a camper's deposit for the summer, he is sent a questionnaire to determine his computer proficiency. Instructors Art Timmins and Devin Brown review the questionnaire and interview the new arrival to confirm the data.

Once here, campers are placed in one of four sections: beginning pilot, beginning or intermediate basic, or advanced topics. This covers player-missile graphics, 6502 assembler, display lists and Pascal. Steven Wu, 25, is the camp's on-site expert who teaches this section and has the last word on hard to solve questions.

For this "camp experience that lasts a lifetime" campers are charged $890 for two weeks; $1,690 for four weeks, and, for the super-charged whiz kid, $2,950 for eight weeks, according to Judy Hudak, operations manager for Atari Computer Camps.

"Our staff is oriented to understand that the child's major concern is to learn more about the computer and to have the time to do this. Kids are given a notebook, copies of printouts and one diskette—to hold all their class developed programs—to take home. It's a double-sided, double-density disk, so it should hold all their work," she said.

For some, maybe it does.

But, what about one 12-year-old, whose primary objectives, as written on this precamp questionnaire, are "to move objects smoothly, with no constant re-drawing, to poke and peek and to learn how to do simple games, like space invaders."

By the summer's end, he's bound to learn also that Basic cannot be "my favorite software program"—something he also noted on his questionnaire. ●